Faith & Inspiration

Greatest Is Love

By Vincent V. Marshburn

A friend of mine possesses a profound propensity for penetrating questions.

He once put forth this statement: "People are often asked if they believe in God. How often are they asked if they love God?"

Typically, belief in God is expected to entail characteristics such as faith and hope. The Bible describes faith as "certainty of things expected" and "conviction about things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). A scriptural depiction of hope centers on divine promise and prophetic assurance (Genesis 17:5, 21:1-2; Psalm 42:5; Jeremiah 29:11). The Holy Spirit imparts hope to those who trust in those promises and assurances (Romans 15:13).

The Old Testament explains that God's chosen people were instilled with hope for the redemption of Creation. They looked forward with faith to the time when the Messiah would come to restore harmony and exercise righteous dominion. The Scriptures are brimming with this anticipation (e.g., Genesis 3:15, Numbers 24:17; Psalm 110:1–4; Isaiah 9:6–7; Isaiah 61:1–2; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Daniel 7:13–14).

One might then wonder why, with such seemingly ingrained and abounding faith and hope, Jesus was not more widely received by those who piously and systematically studied the record of God's wisdom written throughout the many ages. The New Testament does attest to a few select ardent practitioners of Mosaic Law who did come to acknowledge Jesus's fulfillment of the promise of atonement and restoration (John 3:1-10; John 7:50-53; John 19:39-42; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-53).

To be drawn to Jesus is to be compelled to embrace and succumb to that attribute which extends beyond the bounds of institutional formality and reflexive litany — that is, namely, love. Jesus asserted that true love for God and love for others are the greatest of commandments (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28).

The apostle Paul assures us that faith, hope, and love are all important aspects of living out our beliefs. In one passage Paul extols the "work of faith, labor of love, and perseverance of hope" of believers (1 Thessalonians 1:3). In another, he expresses gratitude for "faith in Christ Jesus," "love ... for all the saints," and "hope reserved ... in heaven" (Colossians 1:5).

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul insists that without love, our best efforts are inadequate to authentically express the gospel and touch lives (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). He affirms that love ultimately supersedes all aspirational virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Why would this be so? When redemption is completely fulfilled and Creation is restored to its perfect condition, faith eventually becomes sight; hope becomes reality; but love is perpetual and enduring.

Too often, what people might assume are pure expressions of faith and hope may actually interfere with clearly perceiving the intentions and premise behind the principles of belief. In such scenarios, people often fail to understand or even care about the repercussions of misguided and distorted fervor.

In an episode of the prequel television series "Star Trek: Enterprise," the early iteration of the starship Enterprise embarks on a survey of a part of the galaxy known as the Delphic Expanse. This region of space is filled with various astronomic anomalies along with gaseous formations which interfere with a ship's ability to effectively navigate. The Expanse also contains a number of enormous, artificially constructed spherical objects of seemingly unknown origin and purpose.

During their expedition, the crew of the Enterprise encounters a group of people of a species known as Triannon, who are themselves engaged in a kind of pilgrimage through the Expanse. These Triannons believe that the spheres are the holy artifacts of purportedly divine beings referred by them as simply the Makers.

In the Triannon faith, the Expanse, designated as the Chosen Realm, is being transformed by these spheres of the Makers into some kind of paradise for true believers. These particular devotees are so extreme in their spiritual passion that they consider any deviation or doubt of their beliefs to be the worst heresy, to the point of hostility.

The leader of this group, D'Jamat, intends to force Captain Jonathan Archer to plot a course to the Triannon home world and use the ship's armaments to eliminate the group's opponents in a religious war ravaging their planet. Of course, Archer resists, and D'Jamat triggers an organic explosive implanted in one of his followers, damaging the ship and killing a crew member. D'Jamat advises Archer that all of his disciples are likewise rigged, and Archer is obliged to concede. D'Jamat assures everyone of his "plan to embrace non-violence — as soon as the heretics are eliminated."

As the Enterprise approaches the Triannon home world, the crew manages to retake the ship and subdue D'Jamat. After they conduct a preliminary investigation of the planet, Archer confronts D'Jamat with some tragic findings.

D'JAMAT: You've done a terrible thing, Captain. You've interfered with something that was ordained. After centuries of fighting, I was going to bring an end to the war. We would have had peace.

ARCHER: Peace? One of my crewmen is dead, six others are wounded, my ship is damaged.

D'JAMAT: None of that is important. All that matters is the sacred truth.

ARCHER: You want truth? I'll show you some truth. ... Both sides have been decimated. There are no major cities left. Millions are dead. Your faith was going to bring peace? Here it is.

To reiterate a theme from the apostle Paul: "… if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

Excessive fixation on incidental or trivial details can lead to warped perspective, diminished judgment, and flawed understanding. Ironically, the thing that often prevents the most "devoted" from seeing and accepting sublime spiritual truth is a rigid formulation of religion that claims to prepare us for the reality of God's revelation but proves insufficient.

A disproportionate focus on superficial flourishes of faith and hope can leave little room for the vitality and audacity of love that progresses beyond mere dogma, convention, and intransigence.

From the time of Jesus to ours, the fundamental question remains: Why should a particular baby born in some backwater borough possess any significance or warrant any special consideration?

The conviction of many is that the birth of the Savior was a literal expression of God's love towards us. This momentous and monumental materialization of grace apparently catches many off guard due to prior assumptions, even among the staunch and dutiful. Narrow suppositions of faith and hope assert certain limited or unimaginative expectations. We herald messiahs in our image and envision heavens in our conceits while pursuing epiphany and inspiration on our own terms.

Though we may exert tremendous effort to somehow prove that we have hope and faith, do we expend the same energy for love? We do well to ponder this within and among ourselves during this propitious season of rejoicing and reflection.

Remarkable enlightenment and renewal occur when we come to fully understand that of all the qualities we should cultivate as believers, the greatest is love.

Announcements

HOUSE OF WORSHIP

Homestead Mennonite Church

Address: 30695 SW 162nd Ave,
Homestead, FL 33033
Phone: 305-248-1659
Website: www.homesteadmenno.org

Worship Times:
Sunday Service (Hybrid via Zoom) 5:00 p.m.
Sunday Online Bible Study 9:15 a.m.
Join Zoom Meeting : https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86412358934?pwd=MS9ZSGR5NzNWRGM5WExxSVNJUzVKZz09

Fusion Church

Address: 16325 SW 288th St.,
Homestead, FL 33033
Phone: 305-247-6352
Website: www.fusionchurchhomestead.com

Worship Times:
Sunday Service 11 a.m.
Wednesday Service 7 p.m.
Youth Group (Ages 12-18) Friday 7 p.m.

International Outreach Center

Address: 13080 Southwest 132nd Court,
Miami, Florida 33186
Phone: 305-238-1016
Email: IOC@IOC.LIVE

Worship Times:
Sunday Service 10:30am
Monday prayers 8:00pm Zoom
Wednesday Bible Study 7:30pm Zoom
Join Zoom Meeting : https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7929480723
Meeting ID: 792 948 0723

St. John's Episcopal Church

Address: 145 NE 10th St.,
Homestead, FL 33030
Phone: 305-247-5343
Email: Stjohns1@bellsouth.net

Priests: Rev. Fathers Norbert Cooper and Dwight Morgan
Deacon: Rev. Vincent Tirado

Worship Times:
Sunday 10:00 a.m. (English)
Sunday 12:00 p.m. (Spanish)

Groups:
Bible Study – Every other Friday at 7:00 p.m., in the church office
ECW (Episcopal Church Women) – Monthly meetings after the 10:00 a.m. service

St. John's Episcopal Church is a welcoming parish community, rooted in God's grace and called to know, love, and serve Christ. We are committed to healing, hospitality, and shared discipleship as we grow together across cultures and generations through worship, service, and faithful witness.

Remembering the True Meaning of Christmas

The Nativity Scene performed by Our Lady of the Holy Rosary St. Richard Catholic Church.
Photo by Arturo Morejon

By Aruto Morejon

On Dec 19, Our Lady of the Holy Rosary St. Richard Catholic Church held its annual Christmas pageant, an evening filled with faith, tradition, and joyful celebration.

Directed by Sophia Reyes, the pageant featured performances from every grade level, each presenting an act inspired by the spirit of Christmas.

The program concluded with a powerful Nativity scene performed by the eighth-grade class, reminding everyone in attendance of the true significance of Christmas: the birth of Jesus Christ.

Through this final presentation, the timeless story of hope, love, and faith was brought to life in a way that resonated with both children and adults alike.

When asked why the Nativity play remains such an important tradition especially for younger generations Reyes shared that it helps children remember that Christmas is about God's greatest gift to the world: the birth of Jesus. By sharing this story in a simple and meaningful way, the Nativity play allows children to better understand God's love and keeps the true message of Christmas alive in their hearts.

Beyond its message, the Nativity play also serves as a powerful way to bring families and the community together.

While the holiday season often focuses on presents, parties, and busy schedules, the pageant gently redirects attention to Jesus as the true reason for the season. It creates moments of shared faith, inspires prayer and reflection, and fosters unity as people of all ages gather to honor Christ's birth.

Reyes emphasized that traditions like the Nativity play still matter in today's fast-paced, commercial world because they encourage us to slow down and reconnect with what truly matters.

Amid the noise and distractions of the season, the Nativity play points hearts back to Jesus — celebrating God's love and bringing families and communities together in faith, joy, and reflection.